

February 16, 2015

To: Montana Legislature

From: Betsy Asserson

Re: HB 451

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Betsy Asserson, and I'm here on behalf of my son Henry who has Down syndrome, but also his brothers Jamie and Peter and all the students in MT who could benefit from the passage of HB 451. Henry was born on the 4th of July in 2008 – Independence Day, which has turned out to be fitting for Henry; both in his independent spirit and our dream for him to have independence and dignity in his life. Soon after Henry was born we began working towards that dream by participating in early intervention services – some of which were funded by Part C. We also committed our own resources and those of family and friends in pursuit of our goal for him to achieve his potential. Henry has spent over 1000 hours in therapy since he was born as well as countless hours at home working to integrate the skills worked on in therapy. His current functioning is a testament to those efforts: he can read 100 words, count, get dressed, make his own breakfast, and communicate with his peers.

The MT Constitution states "It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person." To fund special education only until 19 limits the potential of many Montanans who could be more independent, contribute to society in a multitude of ways, and require less support from the state. It is confusing that currently the State invests much needed resources into the education of a vulnerable population, but then cuts off that support when they are on the cusp of being able to function independently in a work or higher education setting.

Please consider voting yes on HB 451 in order to support the educational potential of each individual in the State of MT. I am eager to see where Henry's independent spirit takes him, and the ways in which he will continue to make contributions large and small to those around him. Thank you Madam Chair and Members of the Committee for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Betsy Asserson